

# CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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SIXPENCE

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## TWO YEARS OLD

At two years, the children's books tell us, the child should be forming coherent sentences. That is a fiery test. Do we qualify or are we to be found among the Backward and Difficult?

Looking in the mirror we find several criticisms to make of our development. First we have too few contributors. The Gang reappears too often. Where are the Boys of the New Brigade?

Second—centre could be more closely in touch with circumference. When you write us an account of your doings in Heavy Swink or Tholing-cum-Suffering you don't tell us why you do it. You just say you've done it. So we get less enlightenment than we might. You seldom say, "Bring us a play of this sort or this," or "We have a local theatre, have you a play we can ask for?" Have you tried asking your local proprietor or repertory producer if he'd consider booking a religious play? Would you approve if he did? He might. Stranger things have happened, and if centre knew circumference had "dates to offer" centre might find plays to put forward.

Your letters are appreciative and heart-warming; if we were half as successful as you suggest, we should be even cockier than we are.

But we need co-operation among ourselves to reach the far wider public who could be built up into an interest in religious drama.

*The Three Estates*, undoubtedly a religious play, drew packed houses at the Edinburgh Festival. *Monsieur Vincent*, the religious film showing in the Autumn at the Curzon, London, had never a vacant seat. If the show is good enough the audience is there for it. It's the business of R.D.S. members to act as intermediaries and build up a public that will ask for religious drama and encourage promoters to promote it.

We see behind us in the mirror a set of intermediaries over-busy with other things, hesitant in talking about their own pet hobby-horse, forming at best, enthusiastic but incoherent sentences, far below the standard of the bright and typical two-year-old.

And how do you see us? Are we helping? Are we growing in an understanding of each other's problems? We're not sure unless you tell us, though since our circulation is steadily increasing it seems as if we are. Do you find what you read in these pages applicable, illuminating, recreational in any sense?

Large families have the habit of writing a circular letter which goes the rounds, each member adding his own news. This isn't an impersonal informative quarterly. It's the family news letter. Does it tell you what you want to know about the family, and do you tell the family what you want it to know about you? Do. It's only a question of forming a few "coherent sentences".

## RELIGIOUS DRAMA AND THE NONCONFORMIST CONSCIENCE

By HUBERT CUNLIFFE-JONES

"I wish that people would lay aside the idea that a dramatic instinct is incompatible with sincerity."

So Winifred Holtby, in describing a service (of dedication to the Chinese Mission Field) held in Westminster Congregational Church.

The sentence epitomizes the actual and present difficulty of uniting Religious Drama with the Nonconformist Conscience. I want in this article to stress two points. To those who stand in the Free Church tradition, I want to say that while recognizing the supremacy and centrality of life of the redeemed conscience of the Christian man, it is imperative on that basis to accept and rejoice in the discipline of artistic creation. Of those who do not stand in the Free Church tradition, I ask "Respect the depth, responsibility and catholicity of this churchmanship and recognize that only when it accepts fully and freely the discipline and privilege of religious drama can the task of the Religious Drama Society be fully achieved."

An abiding conviction, perhaps the deepest of all in the Puritan tradition is the appeal to conscience and the claim of conscience for Christ. It is not wholly accidental that the term Nonconformist Conscience arose in the nineteenth century, and whatever the wrong workings of that conscience in that century it stands for something essentially important. It is also something with which the artist as such is ill at ease. Puritanism has a bad name with the critics. I think the reason is the not wholly conscious recognition by the artist that the element stressed by Puritans is not easily brought into harmonious relation with the artistic impulse.

If I may hazard a generalization it is that the term "religious drama" contains a problem of adjustment. It may be true to say that what is called "catholic" churchmanship stresses an aspect of Christian truth which is easily assimilable to drama, while what is called "free" churchmanship stresses an aspect of Christian truth not easily assimilable to drama. If this is right, then for the full meaning of "religious drama" we need both types of churchmanship.

The ultimate problem of man—not the one with which he is most concerned, but that which goes deepest—is man's divided heart. And this can only be eased by the redemption of man's conscience. It is because the Cross of Christ neither excuses man the evil which is in his own spirit nor leaves him to struggle for himself, but brings him where the redemptive passion of Christ may cleanse the springs of his existence that the Gospel is the final answer to human need. For that reason the conscience is primary. We cannot refuse the issue of conscience because we may magnify it unduly. And the problem for the Christian artist is yet not the attempt to hold together two incompatibles, but the attempt to hold in tension two diverse elements whose interaction is necessary for the fullness of living. The Puritan must not abandon his conviction of the supremacy of conscience, but accept the richness of the life of art on that basis. In the long run this is the perspective in which art can give its richest blessings for the enjoyment of human life.

The other abiding conviction that lies behind the phrase, "the Non-conformist Conscience," is a tradition of churchmanship.

Congregational churchmanship takes with the utmost seriousness the New Testament emphasis on the local and the universal church and lays the responsibility for the maintenance of the honour of the Church of Christ not only upon the official ministry, but also upon all those who are committed in covenant membership to obedience to Christ. Now I have no intention of expounding, still less of apologizing for, this tradition of churchmanship. I merely wish to explore its relationship to religious drama, and this is not a good one for understandable reasons. In the first place this tradition of churchmanship does allow a possible crudity of judgement and expression when the local unit is not subject to the discipline of the wider unit. In principle that discipline should be present, but it remains true that in the end the local church is free to make its own decision. In the second place, this tradition of churchmanship does further allow a possible crudity of judgement and expression because the experience of the present moment is not made subject to the experience of centuries. In principle again that discipline should be present. It may be said, and said rightly, that in comparison with the majesty of the Gospel the discipline of the centuries is a light thing, but we have learnt that a freedom in Christ must be a freedom beyond the experience of centuries and not one of the callow mentality that has refused to learn from them. Of course here again this churchmanship is not only influenced by the relation of the Word of God to the tradition of men, but also by the bitter experience that the tradition of the centuries can serve to stifle the guidance of the Spirit in the present.

But further this tradition of churchmanship does allow a possible crudity of judgement and expression when the spontaneous utterance of prayer is not subject to the discipline of an ordered liturgy. Here, once more, this discipline should be there. The freedom of Christian worship should be freedom on the farther side of the inheritance of the centuries, and not an untutored freedom. And the free prayer of this tradition is not unliturgical—the structure of worship and the elements of prayer are given in and governed by the scriptural witness. And it remains true that the reason for this churchmanship lies not only in the Bible though it finds warrant there, but also in the experience of the stifling of worship through profound but formal ritual.

I mention these things to show that this tradition of churchmanship just because it does allow for the responsibility and the response of the ordinary communicant Christian church member, has been guilty of an aesthetic crudity which is from many points of view highly regrettable. But the resolute exclusion of such aesthetic crudity excludes also the personal response of the Christian, and this is of such importance to the growth of the true life of the Church that its omission cannot be contemplated.

Can such churchmanship be linked with the discipline of religious drama? I think it ought and it can. I think it ought because it must be perpetually on its guard lest its freedom degenerate into slovenliness as it need not; I think it can because it is becoming aware of the discipline of culture as compatible with and necessary to the full meaning of its freedom. It should also be said that this churchmanship presents religious drama not only with a problem, but with a great opportunity. For it is only as the discipline of religious drama is accepted by the generality of Christian people that it has won its true place. The immediate aesthetic judgements of the local Christian Community may have been crude. The answer to this is not primarily centralized aesthetic wisdom; but more importantly a sounder aesthetic judgement by the local Christian community.

I want to say a word about the Nonconformist Heritage in the Scriptures and in the history of the Church, because there is much misunderstanding here. We are Catholic and Evangelical Christians and therefore claim everything that is central in the life of the Church as belonging to us. The Scriptures are central in our inheritance and therefore any religious drama concerned with the Scriptures cannot fail to affect and interest us.

We are Catholic Christians and therefore everything greatly Christian belongs to us. We claim our inheritance firstly in the patristic and medieval Church, which lies behind the divisions of the Reformation and the division into East and West. No doubt Nonconformists have in some ways less outward similarity with the earlier habits of the Church, but this does not mean that we do not carry forward their essential witness.

We also claim our inheritance in the Church of Christ throughout the world whatever its confessional label. Our concern is for the Lordship of Christ over the world which He has redeemed, and wherever

that is acknowledged we rejoice. So that if witness is borne to Christ by any Christian group, we are glad to share in the rejoicing and to claim it as part of our inheritance. What this means for religious drama is that the Free Churches are happy about the dramatic presentation of any part of the history of the Church, so long as it is not fussy and precious. We are quite happy with T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* because apart from its other merits it is concerned with an issue of central Christian importance. It is only when in the presentation of Church tradition the central figure of Christ is obscured, and attention concentrated on ecclesiastical architecture, or millinery, or regulation, or on angelic distinctions, that we begin to be restive. And we would like it to be known that we have our own narrower tradition in which there is witness borne to Christ full of dramatic significance and of which the wider Church has no need to be ashamed.

Having said this much on the Nonconformist Conscience I want to say a little about the theology of religious drama. To my mind the essential problems of religious drama are beyond denominational differences, and if they can be solved all Christians will reap the benefit.

In Dr. Alex Comfort's book, *The Novel and Our Time*, there are two sentences about the drama which are illuminating. "The artist," says Dr. Comfort, "leads the expression of a communal attitude which he can criticize extensively, but which he shares himself," and the audience to which he speaks is "a society of onlookers, congested but lonely, technically advanced but utterly insecure".

If this is right about secular drama—and I think it is—what is the function of religious drama? It is twofold. Religious drama must interpret to the Church its own faith. It is no criticism of the Church that it is failing to convince the world of its own Gospel. If it is thus failing in this kind of a world that may well be a sign that it is doing God's will. What is essential, however, is that the Church should convince the world that it is itself convinced of the inescapable reality of the majesty and mercy of Christ and of its rejoicing in Him. If the Church is not doing this, its failure is great.

In these circumstances Religious Drama can do a real service to the Church if it lights up for Christians convictions which they ought to hold, but which come to them with new power when presented in dramatic form. If religious drama can help to make the Church conscious of the joy and greatness of its own faith it has done a real service. The shock of embodied Christian truth is salutary for the community; but as an instrument of conversion its power will be limited, though by no means unimportant.

The other service which Religious Drama can do for the community is to quicken in people those foundation-attitudes without which the Gospel is completely irrelevant. The difficulty of the present situation is not that men and women are not formally Christian, but that the basic experiences which could interpret Christian truth are no longer there for most people. If people understand the meaning of the

experience of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, judgement, mercy, trust, responsibility, decision, gratitude, faithfulness, longsuffering, joy or glory, we can teach them how the Gospel speaks to our condition. But if these experiences are not real to them how shall we begin ?

Dr. Comfort said that " the artist leads the expression of a communal attitude which he can criticize extensively, but which he shares himself ". How far can religious drama keep in touch both with sentiments proper to the life of Christian faith and also with sentiments possible to men and women in our modern community ? That is the crucial problem.

To my mind no one has said more to illuminate this issue than has Charles Williams. I would like to think that the main argument of this paper is in keeping with his teaching. You will remember how he stresses the two ways in which the soul can approach God (*The Figure of Beatrice*, Faber, 1943, pp. 8-10), " One, which is most familiar in the records of sanctity, has been known as ' the Way of Rejection ' ". Shall we call it for our present purpose the Nonconformist Conscience ! The other way is the Way of Affirmation, the approach to God through images. It must, of course, be the way of religious drama. " It was necessary," wrote Charles Williams, " first to establish the awful difference between God and the world before we could be permitted to see the awful likeness. It is, and will always remain, necessary to remember the difference in the likeness. Neither of these two ways indeed is, or can be exclusive."

I have no doubt that you will remember how Charles Williams picked out the experience of romantic love as one in which the truth of God sent its radiance into our earthly existence. So he says of Dante (*The Figure of Beatrice* pp. 20-21), " His spiritual emotions, his intellectual perceptions, his organic sensations, all coalesce in a recognition of it (i.e. of the new relation, the new quality of being into which he has entered) and of her by whom it comes. It is no wonder he quotes Homer, ' She did not seem the daughter of a mortal man, but of God.' A kind of dreadful perfection has appeared in the streets of Florence; something like the glory of God is walking down the street towards him. This state of things is what Dante calls ' Love ' ."

I believe that Charles Williams here is expressing the way into the mind of man, if we can lay hold of it, and that its application is much broader than the fact of romantic love. The normal processes of human living to-day make it very difficult for the ordinary person to be imaginatively aware of anything like the glory of God walking down the street to meet him. It is the task of religious drama to make that awareness more possible than it is; to discover the fact that man is made in the image of God and that all our life has a dimension of depth which we ignore at the cost of our humanness. To restore to human life a dimension of depth ; in that task those who stand in the tradition of the Nonconformist Conscience want to take as large a share and receive as great a blessing as any others.

## SHAKESPEARE'S THEOLOGY

By S. L. BETHELL

(An Address delivered at the Memorial Service in Southwark Cathedral on Shakespeare's Birthday, St. George's Day, 1948)

To-day we thank God for our national heritage in the work of his servant, William Shakespeare. As we contemplate the grand impersonality of his art, where every aspect of human existence is feelingly disclosed, we find it difficult to think of a particular man who wrote at a particular time these marvels of the English theatre. It is good that we should usually forget the man in the work, but I hope that to-day we have spared a moment to think of a man almost unknown apart from his work but who, we know, lived for a time in this parish, and must assuredly have worshipped in this church, and whose actor-brother lies buried in these precincts. As we remember his greatness, let us remember too that he shared the common lot of fallen man, and not forget his own parting request for our prayers. For surely that much-discussed passage in the Epilogue to *The Tempest* is more than a witty announcement of his "positively last appearance":—

" Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free."

The fact that he uses the traditional language of Christian devotion in these farewell words to his loving and no doubt beloved public is a strong indication that he would wish us to remember him to-day as within the great family of the Church—and, with him, all those actors and scholars, past and present, whose devoted labours have preserved and illuminated the heritage which his genius has left us.

If the speculation of certain nineteenth-century writers, such as the poet Swinburne, had been true; if Shakespeare had indeed been a sceptic in religion, with a Hardy-esque sense of the tortured futility of life; if he had shared that attitude which, in a passing moment of despair, is voiced by Gloucester in *King Lear*:—

" As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;  
They kill us for their sport." (iv. i. 36.)

we should still have cause for gratitude and wonder that, without exercising the special insights of the Christian, he had been able to distil so much beauty and wisdom from the bitterness of life. But modern scholarship provides the strongest grounds for claiming that our celebration to-day is truly a family affair, that Shakespeare was an

actively believing Christian and almost certainly a practising churchman. Patient research has revealed his acquaintance with Anglican school-books and catechisms, his use of the Bishops' and the Genevan Bible, and the Book of Common Prayer, the close correspondence between his political thought and the Book of Homilies. His father may have been a Roman Catholic recusant, and there is a late and unreliable tale to the effect that William Shakespeare himself "dyed a papist"; but even in the play of *Henry VIII*, which comes after his "positively last appearance" in *The Tempest*, he was prepared to hail the Reformation as the means by which "God shall be truly known" (v. v. 37). If, as is possible, the words were written by a collaborator, they must surely have had his approval. Presumably throughout his active career Shakespeare was Anglican in belief—and in those days of compulsory church-going he no doubt practised his religion!

I am personally convinced that he was, however, much more than a casual conformist. I believe his insight to be essentially a Christian insight and that his plays are written from the standpoint of Christian theology. Perhaps he was not a consciously Christian playwright, like Mr. T. S. Eliot in our own day, using the drama with a deliberate intention of expressing religious truth; the most secular Elizabethan minds used categories that were still in the main medieval and Christian; but it is none the less true that, compared with many of his contemporaries, his writing reflects much more clearly the traditional Catholic beliefs and values, with only those modifications introduced by the Anglican reformers.

The criterion of naturalistic dramatic criticism, that character determines action, cannot be applied to Shakespeare without qualification. In Shakespeare's world man does not make his own destiny, though he may mar it by a failure of response. Hamlet gradually learns that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" (v. ii. 10) and "a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (v. ii. 232), which is perhaps why flights of angels sing him to his rest. The shaping work is evident in the comedies as well as the tragedies. The great comic heroines are as wise in their acquiescence as they are enterprising and courageous. "O time! thou must entangle this, not I," says Viola, in the midst of her troubles; "It is too hard a knot for me to untie!" (*Twelfth Night*, II. ii. 42). The appeal to Time, Fate, Fortune, is an appeal to the Power beyond ourselves that has the designing of our lives. We cannot begin to understand Shakespeare if we do not recognize this fundamental belief in an active providential ordering of human life.

Ulysses' famous "Degree" speech in *Troilus and Cressida* (I. iii. 75), an exact parallel to Hooker's prose paean on the theme of universal order, is the most exact statement in Shakespeare of the philosophy which all his dramatic thinking implies. The cosmos is ordered hierarchically with all its components in due subordination. Man the microcosm should be similarly ordered under the power of reason, God's vice-gerent in the mind; and the nation, the commonwealth in its healthy state, presents a corresponding hierarchical pattern. The

history plays trace the effect upon our own country of the overthrow of constituted authority in the person of Richard II, a bitter tale of rebellion and counter-rebellion culminating in the tyranny of Richard Crookback, whose defeat at the hand of Richmond unites the white rose with the red "by God's fair ordinance" (*Richard III*, v. v. 31). The same theme of usurpation is more profoundly treated in *Macbeth*. The very thought of killing the good King Duncan shakes the "single state" of Macbeth's mind (I. iii. 140); its reasonable balance is overthrown, so that evil is taken for good and good for evil: as the witches have chanted "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I. i. 11). After the murder Duncan's "Gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature For ruin's wasteful entrance" (II. iii. 119)—a breach in nature because Macbeth, by killing the head of the state and usurping his place, had overthrown the due order of society. Thus a disordered mind produced a disordered commonwealth, as is symbolically asserted in the banquet scene which, beginning with all seated according to their "degrees" (III. iv. 1)—an important feature of feudal ceremony—breaks up in "most admir'd disorder" (III. iv. 110). Even the microcosm sympathetically reflects this violation of order in the affairs of men. Such is the significance of the portents at Duncan's death. A falcon, prince among birds, was "hawk'd at and kill'd" by a plebeian owl (II. iv. 13):—

" And Duncan's horses,—a thing most strange and certain,—  
 Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
 Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
 Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would  
 Make war with mankind." (II. iv. 14.)

The horse is below man in the ordered scale of being as the nobleman is below the king in the state. Duncan's horses "eat each other" (II. iv. 18), and that is the end of all unnatural rebellion: evil forces are mutually destructive. Peace comes to Scotland only with the overthrow of Macbeth and the restoration of Malcolm, the rightful heir, who at the end of the play significantly promises that "by the grace of Grace" all will be done "in measure, time, and place" (V. viii. 72-102) all, that is, in due order and by the grace of God, for "the powers above" have "put on their instruments" (IV. iii. 238) to re-establish the ascendancy of good and to vindicate "degree". Shakespeare seems to have heartily concurred in the high political doctrine of the Tudor and Stuart monarchs. That does not mean that he has nothing to say to our own times. There are different ways of ordering a commonwealth, but order of some kind there must be: for every one there is a place to be filled and a job to do. Order is an expression of the mind of God in creation: chaos is of the devil. The thing to note is that politics in Shakespeare are never a matter of expediency: the political order is an aspect of the divine order; politics are founded on theology. In the present chaotic state of the world, where nature's germens, the seeds of growth, have been tumbled all together by the play of demonic powers, as Macbeth had bidden the witches tumble them

"even till destruction sicken" (iv. i. 60), Shakespeare would point us to the mutual implication of the spiritual and the material realms and the due subordination of the latter to the former. Says the good Banquo:—

"In the great hand of God I stand, and thence  
Against the undivulg'd pretence I fight  
Of treasonous malice." (ii. iii. 136.)

As Macbeth in the political, so Iago in the domestic sphere is a demon of destruction. To Shakespeare the Machiavellianism of Iago, who acknowledged no spiritual restraints, was a "divinity of hell" (*Othello*, ii. iii. 356). That was his reading of the contemporary "new thought" or "new morality" in public and in private life. The Renaissance in one aspect represents the flowering of medieval culture; in another aspect, with the growth of lawless individualism and unbridled nationalism and the discarding of the traditional religious restraints upon political and economic action, it is the parent of our modern disorders. Shakespeare, loyal to the ancient wisdom, was prophetic in his denunciation of the evil courses upon which western civilization was already embarked. There is more than a side-glance at the dawning seventeenth century in the doom-fraught words of Albany in *King Lear*:—

"If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,  
It will come,  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep." (iv. ii. 46.)

But Shakespeare's Christian philosophy did more than inspire in him prophecies of doom. It provided a guarantee of the ultimate triumph of good over evil, order over chaos, life over death. "They say miracles are past," observes the old courtier in *All's Well That Ends Well*, "and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless. Hence is it that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear?" (ii. iii. 1). This is a penetrating and remarkably early comment on the pretensions of "popular science", which in Shakespeare's day was just beginning its ravages of the western mind. Shakespeare clung to miracle; above all to that greatest miracle of grace, the power of human forgiveness. In *Measure for Measure*, which is Shakespeare's "morality play", the Duke seems partly symbolical of God himself. Thus he leaves his dukedom to Angelo, who represents the old Law with its code of stern retaliation, while he walks disguised among his people, like God incarnate. The last scene of the play is a sort of Last Judgement; but the remarkable thing about it is that every one is forgiven, equal charity being shown towards the lax and the over strict. It is a measure of Shakespeare's charity that it included the uncharitable.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the themes of his last great plays, in which romantic legend is employed to symbolize the truths of

religion. The last scene of *The Winter's Tale*, the "coming alive" of the supposed statue of Hermione, is a translation of the Resurrection theme—new life born of penitence for sin and mutual forgiveness—into terms of secular theatre. And Perdita, the young girl, with her natural vigour, her ardent love and simple chastity, is the symbol of that new life of grace; a significant symbol for us since, with her royal blood and country nurture—"the queen of curds and cream" (iv. iii. 161)—she represents also, on the cultural plane, the rural virtues redeeming an effete civilization. Miranda in *The Tempest* has the same function: her unspoiled nature, secluded from the baneful influence of decadent civilization, will be able, as a result of her marriage, to exert a wholesome influence upon two nations, Naples and Milan, just as Perdita is destined to reinvigorate the life of Sicilia and Bohemia. Shakespeare thus advocated the primacy of the rural life, of the shepherd and the tiller of the soil, as a part of his Christian philosophy: in *The Winter's Tale* the old shepherd looks on at the meeting of royalty "like a weather-bitten conduit of many kings' reigns" (v. ii. 60). Shakespeare must have his pun, but his symbolic meaning is clear and readily applicable to our own situation. Nature symbolizes and is interfused with grace; grace restores nature in the individual and in society; indeed grace and nature are ultimately one.

The last word for Shakespeare is the word of life. For though "the cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces" and all the insubstantial pageant shall fade and our little life be rounded with a sleep (*Tempest*, iv. i. 157), we remember that, in Shakespeare, sleep is always remedial ("Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast") (*Macbeth* ii. ii. 39) and that from sleep there is awakening. Paulina, in that trance-like transformation scene in *The Winter's Tale*, which seems to have a foretaste of heaven in the exquisite stillness of its muted verse, has what must be Shakespeare's final affirmation before the tormented and sinful world whose secret heart no man knew better or had more deeply explored. Paulina to the motionless Hermione is also Shakespeare to the world:—

"Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him  
Dear life redeems you." (v. iii. 102.)

Please remember that places in the York Summer School will be limited—Book as early as you can.

*See page 22 for further details.*

### PLAYS IN CHURCHES (III)

*Miss Dorothy L. Sayers, a Vice-President of R.D.S., has honoured us with her comments on Father Westmoreland's article in the last issue. We add a note received from Father Westmoreland.*

THE EDITOR, DEAR SIR

Some portions of Fr. Westmoreland's article in your September number seem to have been written with a rather too lofty disregard to material facts. He says: "The custom, in some large churches, of building a stage against the west wall of the nave, and turning the congregation round to face it, is one that needs to be heavily discouraged. It is right and proper to accept the building as it is."

The plain fact is that if you "accept the building as it is", then in a large church, or even in a small church, nobody behind the first two or three rows of the audience will see more than the heads of the actors, and the people at the back will see nothing. This state of things is under any circumstances exhausting and frustrating to the audience and provocative of very un-Christian feelings; if money is charged for seeing the play it is, in addition, dishonest, and no amount of reverent intention will make it less so.

In order that a play may be reasonably well seen all over a large church such, for example, as Lichfield Cathedral (where my *The Just Vengeance* was performed in 1946), the line of sight requires the stage to be raised not less than six feet above ground-level. This means that, in most cases, if performances are to be given over more than one day, the only alternative to setting against the west wall is to erect a permanent structure at the East End, which blocks access to the High Altar both during the run of the play and during the period of construction and rehearsal before, and demolition after. At Lichfield, the Dean and Chapter had no difficulty in deciding which was the more decent and fitting course to take, and the stage was built at the West End. Such an arrangement has the further advantage that the comings and goings of actors and stage-hands, and such mundane but necessary things as lighting equipment, and dressing-room and lavatory accommodation, can be confined to the west part of the church, and not intruded into the neighbourhood of the Sanctuary.

If the East End is to be used for a show, and if the show is to be seen (which is, after all, its purpose) the only other way to get a satisfactory result is to rake all the seating in the church at vast expense—always supposing that you can get the material and a licence, which in these days is unlikely. The great new church of St. Elizabeth at Eastbourne has, I believe, been built with a slight rake, expressly to facilitate the staging of plays at the East End; but where ecclesiastical architects, ancient or modern, have not had so much forethought, one has to make the best of the building "as it is".

Rehearsal always presents difficulties, particularly if the play itself is built on the large scale which is effective in a large building. It is comparatively seldom that one can find a rehearsal-room of sufficient size to accommodate the production properly. A play that has been insufficiently rehearsed on the stage itself, is always likely (especially with amateur actors) to prove to be a play under-rehearsed, and liable to unfortunate and undignified accidents in performance. In practice, the problem frequently solves itself, since, if the cast is wholly or partly amateur, the only possible rehearsal-time will be in the late evening, when the church will not be extensively used for private worship.

One has to make up one's mind; if a play is to be performed in church at all it must be properly rehearsed, properly staged, and properly seen and heard—for if it is none of these things, neither is God worshipped nor the congregation edified. You cannot serve Heaven with half-measures, fumbling, and dishonesty.

The question whether the play should be more fittingly performed in a hall or theatre depends, of course, upon whether (a) a suitable building is available, and (b) the play is one for which the Lord Chamberlain's licence is obtainable.

I am, etc.,

DOROTHY L. SAYERS.

#### FATHER WESTMORLAND REPLIES:

"The article in question expressed the view of a parish priest, as one article in a series in which, presumably, the producer and technician will also have their say. From nothing that Miss Sayers says about the practicabilities of staging, visibility, and the like, would I, for one, wish to dissent. The concern of the article was not really one of west end stages as against east end stages, as such, but the transformation of a building, apparently into something it was not meant to be. Miss Sayers says, 'One has to make up one's mind.' And how I agree. But it seems clear that she would come unhesitatingly to one decision, and I, with all due deference, to another. For, as I say, it is not really a matter of stages. It is in the last paragraph of her letter that she reveals the real issue. When she says, 'The question whether the play should be more fittingly performed in a hall or theatre depends, of course, upon whether (a) a suitable building is available, and (b) the play is one for which the Lord Chamberlain's licence is obtainable,' then respectfully but firmly, I protest. It is not a matter which can be reduced to a mere expediency. It concerns the nature of the play and the nature of a church."

#### OVERHEARD AT THE GATEWAY THEATRE, EDINBURGH 1948.

"Well then, what are these students?"

"Och, I heard say that they're some kind of a reelegious school or other."

"Is that a fact? Ye'd scarcely think so; they seem sae merry together."

## SUMMER SCHOOLS 1948 CHICHESTER

Those other names to whom Chichester owed its remarkable success—Vaesen, Remington, Oxenford, Cunliffe-Jones, Merchant, Hipwell, the resident Chaplains, and the visiting players—will not take umbrage because they are not mentioned below. What follows is a personal testimony from one of our older members, but all who were students there know that Chichester was an experience quite apart from any summer school they have ever attended. The same devoted work from Secretary, Organizer, and helpers has gone to the preparation of all R.D.S. schools, but there is no doubt at all from letters received afterwards and from reports and conversations at the time, that, at Chichester, something caught fire.

Having been accepted for the Chichester School, and having no previous experience whatever of Summer Schools, I was reading with close interest the notice of the School in the June issue of *Christian Drama*, when one sentence caught my attention: "The buildings, the grounds, and the country around offer an ideal background for a perfect summer holiday."

Memories of my home-city, Durham, and of Cambridge in the 'Nineties—!

I confess with some diffidence that thought of the School was definitely coloured by the "perfect summer holiday". But within two hours of arrival at Bishop Otter College all that was changed.

It was not that the happy holiday sense was in any way lost, but that it was strengthened and enriched by the addition of a purposeful desire to be used and to be made more useful. This desire seemed to take possession of everyone from the first hour of School activity.

We had been asked to arrive in time for 4.30 p.m. Tea on Friday, 23rd July. We did, mustering some 100 students. Soon after Tea we assembled in the Hall, where Students and Resident Staff were introduced to one another. We were then divided into four Groups, each consisting of about twenty-five students with one of the Resident Staff in charge; and each Group wasted no time in getting down to preparation for the work planned for it.

I was fortunate in being allotted to Group A under Pamela Keily, a truly inspiring personality, possessing both the power to infect her Group with the spirit of co-operation and the ability to impart to others knowledge of the Art of which she was clearly mistress.

The desire to co-operate was a marked characteristic of the whole School, especially in the latter part of our week in College.

The particular work of each Group Leader was to produce a Scene from a Religious Play within the six days of the School's life. That of each Group was to become such a proficient Company under their Leader's tuition and guidance as to be able to present the selected Scene for general criticism on the last School evening.

The Scene which Group A had to present was that of the Judgement and Crucifixion from R. H. Ward's *Figure On the Cross*.

After seeing that each student possessed a copy of the play, and using it to conduct a voice-test, Miss Keily selected her cast and arranged her two choruses. (I was in a chorus.) Before that first hour ended everyone had gained in broad outline a clear conception of the Scene to be presented and an invigorating vision of what had to be done.

Before the Groups met again for Rehearsal, E. Martin Browne had twice spoken to the assembled students, first after Supper on Friday evening when he opened the School, and again on the Saturday morning when he gave the first of the Lectures with which each School-day commenced. His subject then was the "Actor and His Part". Speaking of the actor first, he was emphatic in affirming that the actor is one of a community.

Then it dawned upon me that the Group system aimed at just this welding of a mass of individuals into one community.

On Sunday morning yet fuller understanding came when in the opening words of his Lecture on "Worship and Drama", the Rev. Gilbert Shaw made a very simple statement: "*The Actor in Religious Drama Re-presents Religion.*" It was, I believe, as I made a note of those words in my book, that all undue accentuation of Drama ceased, and I began to perceive, and appreciate, how completely Religion was entering into all our activities, colouring the thoughts and utterances of Lecturer and Group Instructor and supplying the subjects for each evening's entertainment.

Now, as these impressions of the School take shape, I recall the consistent regularity of the attendance of both students and Staff at the daily early Communion or Morning Service which, being entirely voluntary, bears strong witness that the common aim was to acquire what the School sought to give—power to present Religion through the exercise of whatever Dramatic Art we might possess.

Was it that we were strangers, and so somewhat shy of one another? Was it that we lacked confidence in our ability to accomplish all that was expected of us in the short time at our disposal? Was it a combination of both these?

Whatever be the cause, my firm impression is that as a body of individuals we took ourselves and our work very seriously for the first two days. Then on Sunday night all that was changed. The School came to life, and we became a jolly family, and remained so to the end.

I cannot help associating this joyous coming to life of the School with the advent of Christopher le Fleming amongst us. It seemed to me that, after his talk that Sunday night on the "Place of Music in Religious Drama", the spirit of joy and song gained entry into our common life. He stayed with us for three days, during which he was mainly responsible for our evening entertainment, and he quickly became Master of Mirth as well as of Music and of Song, the Organizer of Revels which gave great pleasure to many and offended none.

That week at the Chichester School of Religious Drama will live in the memories of all who participated in it as one most rich in the Christian experience of what the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost can accomplish in and through those who possess the will to serve.

## EDINBURGH

## ADVANCED COURSE

It was a very interesting experience, and several "pointers" emerged.

First, we learned that the two sides of the Border could work together happily and profitably; and how hospitable the Scot is only a Southron can know. Second, we learned what a deep debt we students contract to staff who are able and willing to live in, and not only to teach us, but to talk with us. Third, we learned that it is very difficult to establish a sense of community unless the community is in some way cut off from the world for its "school-life". It was impossible to create that sense in Edinburgh this year when staff lived out and both they and students had numerous and strenuous outside commitments. Further, we realized, without any room for doubt, that however "advanced" a course is, it doesn't advance much further if it lacks resident chaplains. Lastly, we learned that the gulf between our own bumbling inadequacy as actors and the exquisite assurance of the professional makes the distance Dives-to-Abraham's bosom, a mere candle-light trip. The high-spots of the Edinburgh week on the whole were supplied by members of the commercial theatre. By Tyrone Guthrie's superb crowd-work in *The Three Estates*, by J. L. Barrault's mime in *Batiste*, and by the crystal perfection of Mozart. The astonishing refreshment of spirit gained through a plan that enabled us to attend all these performances of the Edinburgh Festival in the company of our friends old and new, justifies Edinburgh as an experiment, but it can't rank level with the others as a school of Religious Drama.

## NEWS OF THE OTHERS

## PROFESSIONAL

We refrain from writing a full notice about the Edinburgh production by Martin Browne, of Christopher Fry's fine play, *The Firstborn*, partly because Mr. Martin Browne himself in his article in *Drama*, has fully covered the work of the author and partly because we still hope to see the play come to London. It was marked by some notable performances. To Miss Athene Seyler, Tennyson's words (unchanged save for gender) apply with singular aptness—"with what sublime repression of herself and in what limits and how tenderly" did she devote her powers to a part not really worthy of her. As an exercise of Christian forbearance it was edifying to a degree, but it is an artistic sin for us to consent to the dowsing of all that glinting elegance under a black bushel and a blanket of poetic recitative; her proper Christian duty is to *shine*, and that in no small corner, but giving light to all the House, *Up Candlesticks!*

There was a most moving performance from Miss Henzie Raeburn as Miriam, and a study, full of promise, of a royal child, by Deirdre Doone; Robert Rietty as Miriam's son, Shendy, showed great emotional power; and there is no need for readers of this journal to be assured that the Pharaoh (Robert Speaight) gave full measure of beauty to the lovely verse of the play. Moses? Ivan Brandt's dignity was impressive, but

who, poet or actor, can fully compass such majesty? See it, if you get the opportunity; there is no moment when you will fail to be interested whatever your final verdict.

Here is a record of the impression the play made on a young poet who writes as follows:—

“The *Firstborn* is a poetic drama depicting Moses as the interpreter of a power which he cannot control.

“The drama of the play lies in the consciousness of a huge force symbolized by the thunderstorm; and the irony lies in the fact that this power is asked for by Moses, who is horrified to discover its irrevocable nature. Its result, says Moses, is not ‘part of his intention’, but he does not realize that it is not his ends, but only and entirely God’s ends that are being served.

“First and foremost, however, the play is a poetic drama and it is in its poetry that it is at its greatest.

“The rough crudity of the verse gives it strength and integrity. The poetry as a whole is softened by a blend of this with a delicate lyric strain.”

#### TONGUES AND SHAPES : the So and the Not So

There is, even on the part of Charles Williams’ more ardent disciples, a tendency to assume that most of his plays are too difficult for amateur groups to present or for ordinary people to understand. There is also prevalent a more serious attitude which criticizes them as undramatic. To many who have only a reading acquaintance with the plays these opinions may seem reasonable rather than defeatist. Certainly such strictures have been applied to *The House of the Octopus*; and yet, last summer this play was given two amateur productions.

A rushing-in of fools? But perhaps the proverb is something musty when referred to Charles Williams’ plays, where angels not only tread fearlessly, but bring with them such authority that the “realism” of the usual slice-of-life play seems unreal by comparison. *The House of the Octopus* exhibits this compelling reality in full measure. To experience it in performance is to feel something of the terrible assurance of the Psalmist: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?” or of St. Paul: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” And this is a play about the Church. How many of us begin to realize the Church as something large as life and twice as natural? It *can’t* be; but, the difficult Mr. Williams shows us, it *is*. Shows us, not just invites our consent to theological argument.

But the questions remain: is not the ordinary person prevented from sharing this experience of the play by its “difficulties”—of poetic language and form, of metaphysical discussion, and the rest? And even if the play be granted intelligible as read, is it in the fact of performance “good theatre”?

How far did the two 1948 productions provide answers? Up to a point they had much in common: the players in both cases were young and intelligent students with varying degrees of acting ability; both producers not only understood the script, but made sure that their actors understood it too and spoke the lines with balanced regard to the rhythm of the verse and the meaning of the words: finally, both plays were given in an open-air setting.

At Oxford there was the advantage of late evening performance and the use of artificial lighting (though heavy rain damped everything except the players’ enthusiasm). The garden in the grounds of Exeter College afforded a good background to the simplest of settings, and accommodation for a not too large audience was constructed giving good vision and the advantage of closeness to the players. The Quarry Theatre at Mirfield on Commemoration Day seated an audience of between two and

three thousand so that for most of them no sense of real intimacy with the playing was possible, and audibility had to be abetted with efficient amplifiers. This performance took place in broad daylight and sultry weather. But the theatre has a huge and splendid permanent stage, backed and winged with rock, which the producer used to the fullest extent.

Such physical features determined from the outset a rather different approach by the producer in each case.

Mr. Nelmes at Oxford paid all his attention to the intelligent delivery of the verse and the result was, orally, very creditable; few of Charles Williams' readers would have regretted a visit to what was an accomplished recital of the book. So far, so good: unfortunately the producer stopped there. Some of the actors lent individual imagination to their roles—in particular Assantu gave his lines something like their deserts by the skilled mobility of his eyes and body; while the Siru was outstanding among others less experienced but effective through the constant exercise of a simple yet positive sincerity. But, alas, we echo Assantu's complaint: "I cannot see the shapes I hear." The general neglect of visual interpretation not only meant that the play was half-hidden, but actually detracted from what had been effected vocally. Often the dialogue ceased to hold the attention because the eye was disconcerted by irrelevancies of grouping, the apparent lack of interest of some characters, or the impossibly static behaviour of others in a situation crying out for movement. Seeing is believing in drama; and when the ear and the eye are at variance the imagination is frustrated, and understanding confused. It is no good the Flame verbally treating us to joy and terror if we can see only earnestness and decorum. He must, as a Flame, be alight and alive to all our apprehensions, otherwise when he closes upon us we remain unscorched. What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve over. "Can you see us? Can you hear us? Can you bear us?" he asks. At Oxford our composed replies would have been "No. Yes. Yes", instead of the compelled "Yes. Yes. No!"

It was the more exciting that we were given at Mirfield a complete production by Helen Lamb with full regard to the visual side of things; and the play was translated into abundant life. Over and over again her disposal of the characters demonstrated the situation. It was as though she had taken as her rule the Flame's words before the nightmare vision: "Let us see how it shows visibly." It was not merely that by good grouping, dressing, and free use of movement, a proper value was accorded to the big moments of the play, but that the script was so bodied forth that sight and hearing confirmed each other and understanding came to us without struggle.

*The House of the Octopus* is a play whose theme is incarnate in the plot; its "metaphysics", or its theology, do not lie buried to be dug out by scholars; there is no need of metaphysical interpretation when, as at Mirfield, the play is allowed to be true to itself all ways, thus becoming its own interpreter. This can only happen, however, through the submission and creative co-operation of producer, designer, and players. How much prayer, study, imagination, and hard work must have gone to achieve the result: an experience for the audience at a variety of levels (and by no means restricted to the intellect) of what is going on in life, of the Holy War, of the awful implications of our Faith—"truer than we thought. O truer!"—of Christ's relentless working and our own deceitful hearts.

In an auditorium giving the Flame his rightful chances to accuse and convict the spectators, the ordinary man would find a production as good as this disconcertingly intelligible and quite dramatic enough, thank you.

**M.R.A.** Moral Re-Armament Revue; *The Good Road*; what can one say? The seats were free; the Committee it is said, footed the whole bill, and all the company are said to have given their services; a number of well-known names backed the

programme. A correspondent, after outlining the progress of the Revue, concludes: "How fortunate are the members of M.R.A.; they trust in God and their hens lay better. Job trusted in God and got boils." He concludes: "But could R.D.S. fill His Majesty's for six weeks, even if seats were free!" Could we? Give up His Majesty's and watch—and we won't need the "corps of teenagers" either!

## ALL THE REST

### STAR TURN : SHEFFIELD

BROWN BAYLEY'S STEEL WORKS LTD., YOUTH CLUB

Presents

*GO DOWN MOSES*

By PHILIP LAMB

Produced by PAMELA KEILY.

This was the prosaic announcement on the outside page of the duck-egg blue programme. The real achievements of life are not designed to catch the public eye and so seldom capture the headlines. And it takes a Wordsworth to see that:

"The stars pre-eminent in magnitude,  
Are yet of no diviner origin,  
. . . than those which seem  
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps  
Among the branches of the leafless trees."

Who were the Stars? To come to earth—they were Stan and Stan, Albert and Eric; Brenda and Brenda, Kathleen and Lil and company. They were playing in the said Brown Bayley's Steel Works, situated in that part of Sheffield where steel is rolled and upon which hundreds of tons of soot fall each year—they were playing religious drama of a high order.

"A bad start, Michael," says Satan to the Archangel in the play. And it *was* a bad start. A month or two before the performance a few of us were invited to a rehearsal. It was touch and go then whether it was right to go on with it and Miss Keily thought the presence of a few friendly critics might help them to see it was worth while. A narrow stage in a dismal large room (it couldn't be called a hall) was filled with junk of every description, so that the rehearsal had to take place on the floor of the room. Apart from a few wooden boxes which served as mounts, and the players themselves in their everyday clothes, there were no aids to the imagination. As to the play, the general opinion of the players was that Moses was out of date and "luv" (Eros) was not the main theme. Besides what did the words mean?

The rehearsal began. There were self-conscious giggles and squiggles and flappings of hands unrelated to the movements of the other limbs. Satan was winning hands down because he had a voice that carried and, characteristically, his imagination was alive. Moses, indistinct, indefinite, was no match for him. He was disheartened, had no confidence in his powers and was becoming bored. They were all becoming bored, except Satan, and they said so roundly in the interval. Miss Keily answered with encouragement and inspiration, but without forcing a decision; we supported her and a spark kindled. The spark showed itself when the scene was run through again. Something had happened, they were beginning to come alive, they were beginning to see. At the end of the rehearsal they were sure that they wanted to go on.

Two or three weeks later Miss Keily left for her summer holiday. She returned to find the spark nearly out. Could it be revived? The performance was in another fortnight. Would it be better to cancel it and admit that a Steel Works was not

a suitable stage for Religious Drama? But the bellows were applied, and patiently, patiently, the almost dead spark was fanned into a tiny flame. There was hope.

"A bad start," says Satan; "It is what follows that matters," replied Michael. October 2nd, 1948, arrived. Satan and Michael, magnificently clad in light and darkness, wrestle for the soul of Moses, who is becoming more distinct, more definite every moment as his being apprehends what his mind cannot fully grasp. "God . . . Let your breath set the chill cinders aflame. It is a task beyond my rhetoric." The Chorus of the Children of Israel, *alias* young steel workers, responds, "It would be good to look at hope again. We shall be a people minding our own business." The girls with flapping hands are no longer thinking of themselves, but have found something of themselves that before was not there to find.

"Under the unconceived and unconceivable failure some purpose stands. O God, God, God, God of my fathers, . . . Make your meaning plain." Make plain the meaning of Moses' life-journey, of the crucifixion, of all the unconceivable failures. How? A procession of young steel workers in their working clothes walks up the gangway of the hall on to the stage, chanting, "We are the Church. . . ." Just Stan and Stan, Albert and Eric, Brenda and Brenda, Kathie and Lil, saying, "We must show him the Christ. The light shineth in darkness, And the darkness comprehendeth it not. . . ." No, they could not comprehend it, but far away they could see the light shining in the darkness. *Agape*, a new planet, had swum into their ken.

The play is over. "I was myself and something more. Now I am myself again," said the Chorus. Imagination through the medium of Religious Drama can produce the "something more", as great leadership can. What happens to that plus when "I am myself again"? God knows. We don't. But we who are the Church too, ought to know more than we do.

MARY HARDCastle.

**Salisbury Diocese.** Miss Evelyn Hart (author of *The First Crib* has been appointed Adviser on Religious Drama to the Diocese. Miss Hart is well known as lecturer, producer, and author; we welcome this appointment most warmly and shall look forward with interest to hearing of the activities of the Religious Drama Fellowship in and round Salisbury.

**Sutton.** Trinity Methodist Church, reports the first birthday of The Trinity Players.

"We aim at complete balance in our activities, and we devote equal time to the study and performance of Christian plays. At the Annual Church Meeting we gave *The Rich Young Ruler*, a type of short play we like because it used the whole Group in its principal parts and its Chorus. We repeated that play in London during the May Meetings of the National Sunday School Union. As one of the services in Holy Week we offered *In Three Days*.

"We are now working on *Hamlet in Aldwych* (a short Christian play) (not a farce as its title might suggest), a comedy, *World Without Men* (chosen, obviously, because it was so much easier to cast than some!), and another of our Epilogues, *Simon the Fisherman*. We are, even daring to rehearse Choruses from *Murder in the Cathedral* in our Choral Speaking.

"We are affiliated to the Religious Drama Society, and have welcomed its Secretary Mr. T. G. Bartholomew, in our midst several times."

**Leicester.** *Religious Drama School.* A School was held for the afternoon of Saturday, September 25th, at the Y.M.C.A. Hall in Leicester. The special subject was "Nativity Plays and how to Produce Them." Miss Elizabeth Heward of Derby was the Lecturer. Miss Heward used the Epidiascope and showed groupings from

pictures of the Old Masters. A party of young girls from one of the schools was used by her for demonstrations both for posture and for speech rhythm. About seventy people attended the school from various parts of the Diocese.

*Dramatized Sermons.* The Canon Missioner of the Diocese, Canon Linwood Wright, in his weekly Sunday visits especially in the villages, is using a dramatic method in preaching to the evening congregations. In these addresses as many people as possible are drawn in, including the congregation, the choir, and organist, servers, the verger, and even the bell-ringers. He sends a précis in advance to the parish and has a short rehearsal after the morning service, on the same day, of the choir, organist, and others.

The dramatized sermon lasts forty minutes and holds the people tensely throughout. Churches are drawing much larger congregations than usual.

This method began at a Children's Service, and on this occasion the adults present came to the Missioner afterwards and said: "Why don't you preach like this to adults?"

The joy of choir, organist, bell-ringers, and others at being asked to help the preacher in his sermon is itself very interesting and almost pathetic. Vicars of parishes have written to the Missioner saying that the people continue to talk about the lessons of the sermons. They say they have been arrested through the method adopted. They want more of it.

**Bristol.** *Guild of Cathedral Players.* This Guild hopes to produce *Murder in the Cathedral*, by T. S. Eliot, in the Nave of Bristol Cathedral during the evenings of 5th, 6th, and 7th January, 1949.

In order to widen our activities beyond the plays, the Guild has recently organized two social functions to which all playing and non-playing members were invited. A party was held in June which, without doubt, was a real success. During this party, the players gave a short comic sketch just to show they were capable of lighter entertainment. . . .

**Cambridge.** Mrs. Barrett, writing from St. Giles' Vicarage, Cambridge, about the Westcott House performance of Miss Sayers' *Zeal of Thy House*, says:—

"I was privileged to help 'behind' in sundry ways, and to lend a good many clothes. It was an outstandingly good performance, and one so wishes they could be persuaded to give it again here, where more people could see it; these performances were more or less of a private invitation order. I think we ought to ask them on behalf of R.D.S. to do it again?"

"I have also to report that I have been elected on to the Cambs., Hunts. and Isle of Ely Community Council Drama Committee, representing Religious Drama, and my first effort has been to get Drama Christi to give *Christmas in the Marketplace* at the A.D.C. Theatre in December. We are also inviting them to St. Giles for the *Way of the Cross* in Lent. As Religious Drama is practically non-existent in Cambridge, I think you will be glad to hear of these activities. I hope they may lead to something really worthy being done by local people later on. . . ."

**Dublin.** *The Dublin Religious Drama Group.* (Second season.) Presented *Go Down Moses*, by Philip Lamb, in The Royal Irish Academy of Music, Westland Row, on Friday and Saturday, 5th and 6th November, 1948, at 8 p.m.

**Swindon.** Extract from *Swindon Herald and Advertiser*, 1st October, 1948:—

"In past years the Swindon Religious Music and Drama Fellowship has built up a proud and wide reputation by the quality of its productions and by the profoundly impressive and dignified manner in which it has brought real theatre into the church as an act of worship."

"In colourful costume and played in front of the chancel of St. Paul's Church, Swindon, with a background of religious music and an unobtrusive choir, the Fellowship, on Monday, gave an outstanding performance of *The Zeal of Thy House*, by Dorothy L. Sayers, with incidental music by Gerald H. Knight."

**Liss.** Liss Guild's *The Proconsul*. The most impressive play I have seen this week is *The Proconsul* by Seaward Beddow, which was presented by the Liss Guild Dramatic Company at St. Mary's Hall, Liss, on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

I've used the word "impressive" deliberately. The colour, the spectacle impressed, but above all, the message. And this story of the persecution of the early Christians at a time just before the Roman Empire recognized the Church, was never more relevant. It was the more moving because this was the simple Christian message shorn of the superfluities of modern times.

The players had the advantage of remarkably effective sets and lighting by Michael Soimienow, J. Alphen and E. Lines, but the producer, the Rev. H. N. Wrigley got from his young players an earnestness, conviction, and power which I found almost astonishing. With the exception of two young people of 23 and 22, the rest of the cast was all under 20. It was a co-operative effort of distinction.

**Tavistock.** Deanery Players present *The Just Impediment*. For every man (and woman) in the street who does not know clearly the attitude of the Church to re-marriage of a divorced person—innocent or not—there must be a hundred who have never heard the Church state its case and its reasoning. Written to show in dramatic form the Church's teaching on divorce, the Deanery Players' new production, *The Just Impediment*, was given its first performance—of many to come through the Deanery—in Princetown Town Hall.

The *Tavistock Gazette* says the play "speaks in plain and unequivocal language on practical application of Church teaching to a human problem."

## R.D.S. NEWS AND NOTICES

### SUMMER SCHOOL 1949.

At St. John's College, York, August 27th to September 5th.  
Organizer, Carina Robins

At the request of students we have included two week-ends in the course, but it is hoped that the nine days will not cost more than the week in former years.

The Ministry of Education has invited us to run this school in conjunction with them, and this we have agreed to do, but the character of the school will be unchanged, and, as always, it is mainly intended for producers, but open to everyone interested in Religious Drama.

The difference between this and former schools is that a proportion of vacancies will be reserved for teachers and youth organizers who will be eligible for grant-aid, and who should apply as soon as possible to The Ministry of Education (Short Courses), Belgrave Square, London, S.W. 1.

Owing to this arrangement, rather fewer vacancies will be available for our members and friends who do not come under Ministry of Education categories, and for that reason we are notifying you now, that you may be able to arrange your summer holiday accordingly and apply in good time to be sure of being accepted. A proportion of vacancies will be reserved for men students.

Application Forms will be available from the School Secretary, Jessie Powell, at the R.D.S. Office, on and after February 1st.

There will be six full-time resident tutors as well as Mr. Christopher le Fleming for music. The Rev. Philip J. Lamb (author of *Sons of Adam* and *Go Down Moses*) is the Principal of the College, and it is hoped that he will be the Anglican chaplain.

Further particulars will be given in the next issue of this magazine.

**“SONS OF ADAM,”** by Philip J. Lamb.

This play is being toured in the London area by The Commoners, a newly formed company under the direction of Carina Robins, our Travelling Adviser.

Before Christmas the company played in St. Paul's Cathedral, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and other churches. During January the tour will include the following places :—

St. Mary-the-Virgin, Hampstead.	Friday	January	7th	8 p.m.
Wembley Parish Church Hall.	Sunday	,	9th	7 p.m.
Streatham Congregational Church.	Monday	,	10th	8 p.m.
St. George-in-the-East, Stepney.	Thursday	,	13th	8 p.m.
Southwark Cathedral.	Saturday	,	15th	3 p.m. and 6.30 p.m.

Further particulars obtainable from the R.D.S. office.

## **LIBRARY.**

## **Librarian's Lament.**

The Librarian is distressed to find that her accounts for the past year show the loss of a considerable sum composed mainly of unpaid 2d. and 3d. fees. Members find but little difficulty, it would seem, in paying a round sum of 2/6 for borrowing a set, yet many are quite incapable of enclosing a mere 2d when returning a single book. A post-card of reminder would defeat its own object; as it is the small fees do not cover the heavy cost of postage.

If these few words bring a rosy blush of shame to the brow and a scalding tear to the eye of any Gentle Reader . . . what about a New Year's Resolution ?

The following books have been added to the Library since the last issue of *Christian Drama*:—

\**The First Good Joy*. ISABEL RENDELL, U.L.P. 1942. Reprint 1948. 11 m., 2 w., supers optional, 3 scenes, 25 minutes. Simple setting. This little play in dialect will be found specially suitable for village groups and beginners.

\*From the *Nursery of Heaven*, Chelmsford 1936 Nativity Play, U.L.P. Compiled from Ancient Sources by PHILLIS M. POTTER. 8 m., 1 w., angels, camels, sheep, children of the World. "The scenes are lain in Heaven, Bethlehem and, if you will, in your own heart." Time : Yesterday, To-day, and To-morrow.

\**Hamlet in Aldwych*, VERA I. ARLETT and H. F. RUBENSTEIN, New Plays Quarterly, Rylee Ltd. 1/8. 3 m., 2 w., lb. 1 Act. Scene Outside St. Clement Dane's Church, the Strand. A.D. 890. Hamlet visits Alfred the Great and his daughter. They challenge him to consider the Christian value of forgiveness, pardon and peace, in place of revenge and war.

*Innocent Blood.* THOMAS DORAN, Muller 3/6. 9 m., 4 w., 4 scenes. 1½ hours. For Passiontide and Easter in Church or hall. Series of episodes culminating in the Upper Room on the Resurrection morning.

\**No Plaster Saint.* GILBERT CESBRON, trans. by MARGARET WALDRON, Wallis & Carter 7/6, 1948. 6 m., 14 w. Prologue and Three Acts. The story of St. Theresa of Lisieux. Though occasionally its conscious virtue and piety jar, this drama of the inner conflict of a human soul is drawn with nobility and insight. It is more suitable for reading than acting and should be attempted only by very advanced players.

\**The World Turned Upside Down.* CLIVE SANSOM, F. Muller Ltd. 5/-. Cast of 18, guests, soldiers, refugees and the Voice. The marriage of Religion and Science, from which a new faith might be born or an old one revived, is suggested as a remedy for our present inverted world. Churchmen and Scientists will find much that is provocative and questionable in this play, but no one can fail to be moved by the beauty of the verse and the felicity of the imagery. It needs skilful production and experienced acting ; teachers of verse-speaking would find extracts admirable for class work.

### In Typescript

\**Cyprian.* FREDA COLLINS. 19 m., 7 w., 3 Acts, 9 Scenes. Carthage in the third century. This play concentrates on the controversy upon penance for those who recanted in the face of persecution, and its consequences on the family of Cyprian, Primate of Carthage. The story leads up to his martyrdom, showing this to be the deliberate consummation of his ministry. The main events of the play, and most of the characters, are historical. The theme has a special message for these times when Christians are once more called to martyrdom.

\**The Great Magician.* Translated into English verse from the Spanish of Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca by the EARL OF LONGFORD. 9 m., 2 w., attendants, townspeople, phantoms, etc. Scene : Antioch and its neighbourhood under the Roman Empire in the third century A.D.. Cyprian, the brilliant pagan scholar, sells his soul to a Demon who promises him in return the love of a Christian maiden—Justina. But God protects her from their evil designs and this kindles his faith. Side by side Cyprian and Justina are martyred as followers of Christ. Light relief is provided by Cyprian's two servants who are both courting Justina's maid.

### Set

*All Things New.* SHIRLEY ST. CLAIR.

### Reference Library

Books on Costume by IRIS BROOKE:—

*English Costume of the Early Middle Ages. Tenth to Thirteenth Century.*

*English Costume of the Later Middle Ages. Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.*

*English Costume in the Age of Elizabeth. Sixteenth Century.*

*English Costume of the Seventeenth Century.*

Published by A. & C. Black, Ltd. 9/6 each.

*Poetry Speaking for Children.* Pts. I and II. 5th edition. MARJORIE GULLAN and PERCIVAL GURREY, Methuen & Co. 3/- and 4/-.

*The Right Way to Radio Playwriting.* VAL GIELGUD. Right Way Books. Rolls House Publishing Co. Ltd. 5/-.

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